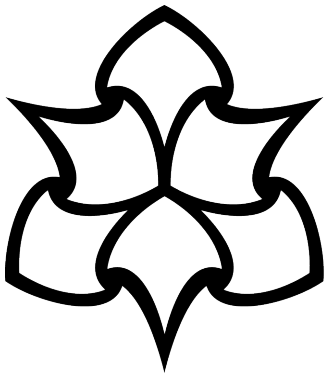

Title:

"Risking Autonomy: Comparing Teachers And Senior Leaders In England And Turkey"

Theoretical framework

Increasing workloads are allowing less time for teachers to recuperate and recover in periods of rapid change (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) leading to teacher, teacher compliance and loss of motivation, pride and creativity (Lundström, 2015). Engagement in decision-making can be both a solution, where this facilitates a sense of teacher autonomy, or a problem, where engagement in decision-making becomes an additional burden against a heavy workload (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014). As Pietarinen et al. (2013) argue, workload distress is exacerbated where teachers feel a lack of control, meaninglessness and a sense of unfairness.

In an effort to secure the delivery of high quality education in schools, many countries have implemented systems of educational regulation (Eurydice, 2004). Whether such control mechanisms are efficient, effective, or even practicable, have been the subject of debate over the past two decades (De Wolf & Janssens, 2007). Moreover, professional accountability in education is in crisis, challenged by managerial hierarchy and the market.

> Teachers are central actors in an increasingly complex web of accountability relationships based on external controls and professional autonomy…(Mattei, 2012, p. 249)

De Wolf and Janssens (2007) point out that there are many disadvantages to using accountability mechanisms, such as, misrepresentation, proceduralisation, teaching to the test, performing for inspection, myopia, ossification and stress. Furthermore, school inspections increase the pressure exerted by the inspection system (Jones et al., 2017). Therefore, the process of holding schools to account can impose high costs without securing substantial benefits (O'Neill, 2013).

In order to be accepted as autonomous, teachers need to be "allowed to work with their students, free from the pressures of strict standards, external national tests, public league tables, or inspection systems" (Ropo & Välijärvi, 2010, p. 214). Whilst governments generally define the boundaries of autonomy in schools (Eck & Goodwin, 2010), different levels of public regulation provide an explanation for why experiences of school autonomy vary between countries (Glenn, 2005). The PISA 2015 results indicated that school leaders in Macao-China, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and in the United Kingdom reported the highest level of autonomy in their schools. In contrast, autonomy was considered to be limited in Greece, Jordan, Tunisia and Turkey (OECD, 2016). This would seem to indicate that high government regulation can be associated with low school autonomy (Greany & Waterhouse, 2016).

Greater 'autonomy' however, brings with it a raft of new 'constraints' for all staff across the teaching profession and,

> school leaders with increased autonomy find themselves differently positioned and their responses to competitive and performative demands and expectations

> range from acquiescence and strategic compliance to outright resistance (Gobby et al., 2018, p.160).

Moreover, power is distributed towards markets at the expense of individual teacher autonomy thereby eroding trust and degrading the autonomy of teaching as a profession (Lundström, 2015).

This paper focuses on issues of autonomy and accountability in two different contexts. We look at data gathered from school teachers and senior leaders from one high autonomy, high accountability context, England and one low autonomy, low accountability context, Turkey. Through exploring change management in both settings, we argue that there are many similarities between the two apparently different contexts which raise questions about the extent to which teachers in England are indeed autonomous and we also question the apparent lack of autonomy that teachers in Turkey can exercise.

Methodology

The data presented from England represents a study of 21 schools including both primary (pupils aged 4-11) and high schools (pupils aged 11-16). The data presented are drawn from semi-structured interviews with 42 educators working within these schools. The educators included senior leaders (headteachers and deputy heads) and teachers. Interview questions were established to investigate the ways in which accountability and assessment agendas interplayed with agendas for school change and educators' sense of autonomy. These questions were then adopted by the Turkish research team in order to gather some equivalent and comparable data. The Turkish team focussed on lower (aged 10-13) and upper (aged 14-17) secondary school settings drawing data from 12 schools and 36 educators. The educators ranged from senior leaders (principals) to teachers. Clearly only a selection of the data is presented here but is drawn upon because it represents the majority of responses around the topic of autonomy or the extremes within the data.

For the English study, schools included were either part of a large Multi-Academy Trust or from a Teaching School Alliance covering schools from the south to the north of the country and representing a range of inspection outcomes. In Turkey schools were identified from the Eskisehir district. Schools were selected to represent diversity in relation to student scores in their Transition to High School Exams (THSE) tests and a range of socio-economic backgrounds based on information obtained from Eskisehir Provincial Directorate of National Education.

Semi-structured interviews "directly solicit the perspectives of the people we wish to study" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 75) and allowed for the description, explanation, understanding, interpretation and rich critique to be garnered as part of the data gathering process (Creswell, 2013). Participants in both settings were recruited on the basis of their willingness to be interviewed. Ethical permissions were obtained, and interviews conducted on the basis of informed consent (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were voice recorded and lasted between 29 and 54 minutes. The Turkish interviews were translated into English, and read through by a native English speaker in order to address questions around understandings and interpretations. We worked both separately and then together to draw out thematic categories from these data. Texts were read and re-read to facilitate the power of the participants voices whilst targeting "specific problems in specific substantive areas" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 250).

Conclusions

Both systems governed through externally developed curricular. This is monitored through accountability regimes in England and strong policy level control in Turkey. Heads and principals in both countries demonstrated potential distance between senior leadership and the rest of the teaching staff through language that set them apart, senior leaders adopting varying degrees of authoritativeness. There were also some similarities in the senior leader's expressed need for compliant staff, albeit the heads in England being more cautious about how they expressed this wish. Agendas of compliance resulted in clashes through teacher resistance in Turkey and a more coercive, responsibilising approach in England. There also appeared to be problems with both the rigidity of the accountability system in England, which makes notions of autonomy a rhetorical 'slight of hand', and the loose system of Turkey where converting policy into practice is not investigated or assessed. Whilst it is necessary for schools to be professionally accountable given their remit to educate our children (Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014), it seems important to recognise that teachers will always need freedoms to educate in a flexible way and through a lively and enriched curriculum that stimulates both the children and the staff in schools. The data here indicates that neither high or low accountability seems capable of delivering such an agenda because both impact negatively on teacher autonomy.

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